DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 367 230 HE 027 196

AUTHOR Lewis, Jeanne G.; Roth, Margarete M.
TITLE International Business and Liberal Arts Education: Building a Better Mousetrap.
PUB DATE Apr 93
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Eastern Michigan University Conference on Languages and Communication for World Business and the Professions (12th, Ypsilanti, MI, April 1-3, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Area Studies; *Business Administration Education; *Cultural Awareness; Cultural Context; Cultural Influences; *Curriculum Development; General Education; *Global Approach; Higher Education; *Interdisciplinary Approach; International Studies; *Liberal Arts; Majors (Students); Skill Development
IDENTIFIERS *Illinois Benedictine College

ABSTRACT

American business education results in practitioners with high-level business skills but lacking the broader knowledge and habits of thought that enable them to use these skills in the complex global marketplace. This knowledge should include familiarity with the economic, political, social, and cultural diversity that is part of the human heritage, and an understanding of how these factors structure the contexts in which business is done. With these considerations in mind, Illinois Benedictine College constructed a multidisciplinary program combining traditional functional instruction with discipline-based instruction in international history, comparative economics, and other relevant international social sciences and humanities, including an 18-hour foreign language requirement. Many special courses were developed by the history, political science, economics, and language departments; some were team-developed and/or team-taught. The major builds an understanding of the nature of culture and cultural processes that can be applied to specific social and cultural systems. Some area-specific culture and business courses are also offered. Two additional programs developed include weekend minicourses outlining social and cultural contexts of business in specific countries, and a 5-year program that allows students in some majors to earn a master's degree in business with 1 year of additional enrollment past the bachelor's degree. (JDD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

International Business and Liberal Arts Education

Building a Better Mousetrap

Jeanne G. Lewis and Margarete M. Roth

Illinois Benedictine College

ED 367 230

IBE027196

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Geoffrey M. Voght
Eastern Michigan University

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☑ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Twelfth Annual EMU Conference on

Language and Communication for World Business and the Professions

April 1 - 3, 1993

Ypsilanti, Michigan

INTERNATIONALIZING BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

International Business and Liberal Arts Education

Building a Better Mousetrap

Jeanne G. Lewis and Margarete M. Roth

Illinois Benedictine College

Although American business education produces some of the most skilled practitioners in the world, it has thus far failed to produce practitioners capable of reversing the decline in American global competitiveness that has been all too evident since the 1980's. Despite over a decade of general alarm, theorizing, grants and widespread revamping of undergraduate business education, the trade deficit continues to expand and increasing numbers of American industries continue to succumb to foreign competition.

A fundamental source of this problem may well be the contradiction that lies at the core of American business education: American students are thoroughly, even exhaustively educated in general business skills and in the functional areas of accounting, marketing, management and finance but they are proportionally, and increasingly, undereducated in the general knowledge that in earlier generations enabled business practitioners to comprehend and deal with the broader social and cultural contexts in which business practices are embedded and by which they are so profoundly affected.

In recent years undergraduate major programs in business have undergone explosive growth in terms of the sheer number of credit hours required for graduation. Currently a typical program may entail fifty to sixty credit hours in business courses and

prerequisites. When added to twenty to thirty hours of general education requirements, many of them devoted, to be perfectly candid, to what amounts to remedial instruction in basic numeracy and literacy, little time is left for the student to acquire general knowledge of any appreciable breadth or depth. In turn, students from such unbalanced undergraduate experiences enter professional and graduate programs that traditionally, and perhaps more appropriately, do nothing to correct this problem, instead pushing the student into disciplinary specializations whose contents frequently assume, though they do nothing to provide, significant knowledge of the variety and complexity of the social and cultural worlds in which real business is practiced by real people.

The outcome of this process is practitioners who have a very high level of business skills but who lack the broader knowledge and habits of thought that would enable them to use these skills in the complex arena that is the contemporary global market place. This knowledge should include familiarity with the economic, political, social and cultural diversity that is part of the human heritage and an understanding of how these factors interact in and help structure the contexts in which business is done. The necessary habits of thought include openness to a variety of approaches to problem solving and a value basis for distinguishing optimal alternatives from likely possibilities, as well as the ability to integrate seemingly disparate methodologies and data into meaningful wholes. They should also include flexibility, an attitude towards risk-taking that confuses it neither with

uninformed spontaneity nor with recklessness and an approach to the new and the diverse that treats them as challenge and opportunity.

Such knowledge and habits of thought were in earlier times the rightful attainment of every truly educated person, founded on a solid liberal arts education and expanded and reinforced by elders and peers in the workplace. That this is no longer the case is due in part to the fact that workplace elders and peers themselves lack the appropriate general knowledge, particularly of global social and cultural contexts, and have forgotten its importance amidst the clutter of computer generated data, hyperspecialization and resistance to the general, the qualitative and the value-laden that is too frequently characteristic of modern corporations. But it is also due to the fact that we, the educators, have sacrificed the formative liberal arts experience that our students so badly need to what frequently amounts to little more than job training and have done so, in part, because we ourselves have forgotten or come to mistrust the foundational sources of our own knowledge and habits of thought.

With these considerations in mind, when we began to construct our own international business program in 1978, we realized that we had basically two options: to internationalize all functional courses, attempting to infuse them with international social and cultural as well as more purely functional learning, or to create a separate multidisciplinary program, intended to combine traditional functional instruction with discipline-based instruction in international history, comparative economics and

other relevant international social sciences and humanities. We chose the latter course for both reactive and proactive reasons. On the one hand we thought internationalization of all business courses an unrealistic goal, since in the late 70's and early 80's faculty members in our business department were not prepared to address the international aspects of their functional specialties nor were textbooks significantly internationalized. On the other hand, we favored the multidisciplinary program because we were and remain, convinced of the importance to international business of the kind of general knowledge and habits of thought we have described and felt that only a special multidisciplinary major could prescribe the necessary social science, language and humanities courses in addition to the necessary business courses. The resulting major is rigorous and demanding, not only in the number of credit hours required but in the variety of challenging, upper-level courses as well. As a result, students are self-selected and tend, we believe, to be just those risk-takers who welcome challenge that American business so badly needs.

The curriculum we developed combines courses in the functional areas of business with courses in international history, economics, political science, geography, anthropology, and sociology as well as an 18 hour foreign language requirement. Many of the required courses were already in place prior to the major's development, part of the College's regular offerings in language and the social sciences. Others were especially developed for the major and have become valuable additions to the College's general offerings as well as integral parts of the

International Business and Economics program: At our request the history department developed special courses in the economic history of the world regions, with emphasis on major U.S. trading partners like Japan and Western Europe. The political science department created new courses in comparative politics, international law and Third World political and economic development. The economics department expanded its offerings to include courses in international trade and development, comparative economics and international finance and the language department developed courses in business language and cultural usage.

The major particularly stresses the significance of cultural and social influences on international business. Questions about how to deliver such knowledge and how they were resolved is illustrative of the process of course selection and construction for the rest of the program: Initially, we considered two approaches to the delivery of social and cultural components. The first option was the culture area approach in which students would combine available history, language, literature and other courses with some especially designed business courses, like "Culture and Business in Japan" or "Culture and Business in the Arab World", to create in-depth knowledge of the cultural and social context of business in a specific world area.

The strength of this approach is obvious: It prepares students to do business in a specific country or area of the world. Its weakness is that it prepares them for only that, not for the real situation that will face them. That is, a situation

in which they have no certainty of working in that part of the world they have studied and no certainty of remaining there if they get there in the first place. In reality, particularly if they are successful, they will find themselves now in one part of the world, now in another, unable to usefully transfer the specific cultural knowledge they have so painstakingly learned from one area to another.

The second option was to concentrate cultural instruction for the international business major on building an understanding of the nature of culture and cultural processes that could then be applied to specific problems and concerns in specific culture areas. The strength of this approach is that it equips students with a general framework into which they can fit the data of specific social and cultural systems, a language that enables them to condense massive amounts of specific data into manageable wholes and facilitates comparisons and methodologically sound ways of distinguishing and relating the social, cultural and interpersonal-behavioral factors that construct and inform specific situations. The weakness of this approach is obvious. It does not ground students in in-depth knowledge of a specific culture, although it does teach them to gather and analyze such data when they need it.

In considering these options we decided to preserve both while emphasizing the latter. Students are free to construct area specializations from available courses if they wish to do so and the business department in conjunction with area specialists has created some area-specific culture and business courses to

facilitate this. All students however, are required to have some grounding in general culture theory. This instruction is provided by an anthropologist who is a member of the business department and who teaches both some traditional courses in culture theory and some courses specifically designed for the international business program, like a course in cross-cultural psychology and one on cultural contact and change.

To facilitate development and delivery of multidisciplinary courses as well as to model the integrative, liberal arts approach to students, a number of the courses have been team developed and/or team taught by faculty members from different disciplines in the social sciences, humanities and business. Last semester the authors developed and team taught two courses: Introduction to International Business I, in which the economist was the primary teacher for sections on international trade, finance and government policies and the anthropologist the primary teacher for those on political, social and cultural factors. The second semester of this course is being taught by a business professor, who uses a variety of guest-lecturers who are practitioners in the various functional areas of international business. The second team taught course was Economic and Cultural Geography of the Developed Countries in which the economist dealt with the economic, political and historical factors that affect international business in Europe, the former Soviet Union and Soviet Bloc countries, Japan and North America and the anthropologist with the social, religious, linguistic ad cultural factors. The second semester of this sequence, Economic and

Cultural Geography of the Developing Countries, is being taught by the anthropologist, although ideally it should also be team taught.

The program encourages and attempts to facilitate overseas study by helping students locate appropriate study abroad programs and assisting them in working out credit transfers. We have also developed overseas internship programs because we believe that immersion in a business environment in which students must use other languages and struggle to deal with different cultural and social contexts is not only good preparation for their future careers but also provides a graphic illustration of the significance of the nonbusiness components of our program. Invariably students return from these experiences telling anyone who is willing to listen to take as many international liberal arts courses as they can squeeze into their schedules.

Recently, we have developed two additional programs, using the same principles, that have been successfully offered to area business practitioners and undergraduates who are not business majors: For adult international business practitioners, whose concerns are, for the most part, more specific, we have created what we call business and culture immersion weekends: weekend minicourses that serve to introduce business practitioners to the factors that shape the social and cultural contexts of business in specific countries that are significant U.S. trading partners; for example, Mexico, Japan and Germany. Although the emphasis of the weekends differs depending on specific problem areas or current events, all feature presentations on the geography and history of

the country in question, its social, political and economic orders and its business practices. Each topic session is presented by an academic, professional or government expert in the area and the number of participants kept low to facilitate discussion. These weekends cannot communicate all the relevant social and cultural information needed to conduct business in a specific country. They can, however, introduce practitioners to information that can help them formulate the right questions and lead them to resources that can help answer those questions.

For undergraduates who choose to pursue a traditional liberal arts major but also want some practical business training, we have developed a five year, 4+1 program that allows majors in sociology, psychology, political science, international business, mathematics or foreign language to earn either an MBA or MOB with only one year of additional enrollment. During their undergraduate years, students take two years of foreign language and three years of international business and economics courses in addition to their regular major requirements. During their senior year they take some graduate courses. In the fifth year, following an overseas internship experience, they receive their functional business training in the graduate programs. The student who completes the program has sound liberal arts training, advanced training in the functional areas of business and solid grounding in international and cross-cultural instruction and experiences.

In the thirteen years since the first graduates of our International Business and Economics Program left the campus, many

things have changed. Great strides have been made by business faculty towards developing competence in the international aspects of their functional specialties, theory and methodologies in these specialties have become more comprehensive and sophisticated and textbooks are now routinely internationalized. And yet little has changed. Many business faculty remain uncomfortable with all but the most superficial aspects of internationalization, much theorizing still fails to account for the extensive penetration of the social and cultural into business problems, many textbooks continue to confine cultural and social factors to single, separate chapters and to treat international variations in the functional areas as exceptions, and America continues to struggle in the global arena. Thus, for us, the question still remains as to whether it is sufficient to offer internationalized business courses or if much of the knowledge and many of the attitudes necessary for successful international business practice are still not best found in courses whose disciplinary bases are outside the business department.